

MODERN FREETHINKER

- ☐ **Yogic Flying by the Mahesh Yogi Clan**
- ☐ **Ban on Foreign Funds for 36 organizations**
- ☐ **Communal violence in Gujarat**
- ☐ **Punjab Killings and Delhi Communal riots**
- ☐ **Kerala's new Party**
- ☐ In the new series "Rationalist State" Joseph Edemuruku writes—

What is Rationalism?

Join the Indian Rationalist Association

The Indian Rationalist Association is a national organization actively engaged in the building up of an effective rationalist mass movement. Delhi is the headquarters of the association and we have branches in several states.

The Indian Rationalist Association fights religion as it is an exploitative structure. It also fights caste-system, superstitions, blind beliefs and all sorts of exploitation. It strives for the establishment of a new secular culture, parallel to the denounced religious culture. It promotes inter-religious and inter-caste marriages. It highlights scientific temper and spirit of inquiry. While criticising religions and social evils, rationalists are courageous enough to abstain from them also. A rationalist does not practice religion or caste in his personal life.

- ☐ If you have already a rationalist group, we request you to make it a branch/unit of Indian Rationalist Association so that the efforts for an integrated, coordinated rationalist movement could be further strengthened by your joining together as an integral part of the national rationalist movement.
- ☐ If you are an individual rationalist, please take initiative to organize a small group of rationalists. You may explain to other like-minded people the aims and objectives of the association. Once the group is formed, make it a part of Indian Rationalist Association. We shall connect you to similar groups working in areas closer to you.

For more details and a copy of the Rules and Regulations of Indian Rationalist Association, please write to

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Modern Freethinker

JOURNAL OF THE INDIAN RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION

Editor : SANAL EDAMARUKU

"Yogic flying" by the Mahesh Yogi Clan

Under the expectant gaze of Sankaracharya of Jyothirmath and about 8000 citizenry, about three dozen youths from as many countries demonstrated "yogic flying" at Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium at New Delhi, but were unable to "take off". The much publicised "highway to world bliss" was inaugurated on foam mattresses on 21st July evening. The yogic fliers however failed to fly, and many of them fell flat on their faces while others stayed firm on the ground--and that on all fours.

The programme was organised by 'Maharishi' Mahesh Yogi to create 'world peace'. The explanation given by Dr. Bevan Merish, the head of the Maharishi International University, U.S. and the master of ceremonies at the function was as follows: "Meditators' brain waves become orderly to the point where fluid co-ordination between mind and body is complete. At this point the body rises off the ground. Yogic flying took place when the phenomenon of "classical" gravity failed to apply on the person because the person was at that time in connection with a more "fundamental" level of natural law!"

Though the above and much more gibberish with a scientific jargon to eye-wash the gullible were delivered, the Maharishi's ardent acolytes had to admit that yogic flying is something that they hope to achieve some day. According to them, only the now-reclusive Mahesh Yogi is supposed to be capable of it.

September 1986

3

The yogic levitation has several times failed in front of skeptical audiences, earlier too. The maximum one could do was jumping half a meter up from a thick foam or spring mattress, which does not need any 'meditation' or spiritual power. The "yogic flying competition" on spring mattresses (a 25 m. hurdles, a 50 m. race, a high jump and long jump) was claimed to be held while the competitors were in deep meditation. For one thing, the period between going into meditation and the jumping while in lotus position was perceptible as little as about 15 seconds in quite a few and about 10 seconds for many. Nor did it make for credence when a competitor came to an abrupt halt in the middle of the race, irritably brushed a fly off his nose and resumed bouncing forward the next second. That happened more than once.

We invite once again "Maharishi" Mahesh Yogi and his organization to accept the challenge of Indian Rationalist Association that offers Rs. one lakh to anyone with supernatural powers. If Mr. Mahesh Yogi or any of his disciples can fly or levitate in the air by yogic powers, in fraud-proof conditions, he/she can claim this prize-money and easily convince the skeptical ones without running full-page advertisements in national newspapers. Will Mahesh Yogi be courageous enough?

Ban on foreign funds for 36 organizations

We appreciate the union cabinet which has boldly stopped 36 organizations from receiving monetary contribution from abroad. This was done after having acquired strong evidence that the funds were not being used for the declared purposes, but for promoting disorder, social unrest and fundamentalist teachings. Most of these organizations are religious ones or educational institutions run by religious organizations.

Year after year, the amount of inflow of these contributions has been growing. The total inflow increased from Rs. 209

crores in 1980 to Rs. 233 crores in 1982. The figures for 1983 and 1984 are still being computed.

Strong suspicion of these organizations diverting funds for disruptive purposes like fomenting social unrest in tribal areas, promoting fundamentalism, creating communal riots & caste riots and conversion of innocent persons to different religious faiths have been the criteria for black-listing them. While all these 36 organizations have been prohibited from receiving any foreign contribution, leniency has been shown to one organization. It is the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee of Amritsar. This organization has been allowed to receive funds in some cases, but refused in some other cases.

The government has also rightly taken certain interim steps against organizations suspected of diverting the funds for disruptive use. In some cases, permission to receive contributions has been refused. In some other cases, registration applications for entitlement to receive contributions have been turned down. Some organizations already registered have been deregistered.

The 11 organizations deregistered in 1985 were all Christian—eight of them in Andhra Pradesh, two in Delhi and one in Maharashtra. The 15 refused registration in the same year were an assortment of religious, educational, welfare, and social organizations. The ten organizations refused permission to receive funds are of a political nature.

Among the organizations refused permission to receive foreign funds are Sri Saraswathy Vidya Mandir, Bangalore; Al-Jamiatul Islamia, Tilukhama, U. P.; Depressed People's Welfare Association, Lelagadi, Tamil Nadu; Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar; Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, New Delhi; and All India Majlis-e-Tamir-e-Millat, Hyderabad.

The amendment to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act in 1984 made the ban on political parties from receiving foreign fund absolute. Besides, it barred organizations "of political nature" from receiving contributions without prior permission of the government.

Simultaneously, the home ministry notified a list of 143 organizations which it considered to be of "political nature". It included all the trade unions, youth and student organizations. Among the other organizations were the Dal Khalsa of Chandigarh, Jameet-e-Islami of Srinagar, the Akhil Bharat Nepati Bhasha Samiti, Anand Marg, Delhi Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee and SGPC, J & K Islami Jamaat-e-Tulba, the India-China Friendship Association and Indo-Soviet Cultural Society.

Communal Violence in Gujarat

Communal violence has assumed alarming proportions. Many parts of the country are communal tinder-box now, which would burst into fire with a small strike. In Gujarat, in Maharashtra, in Uttar Pradesh, communal violence is still atop. The simmering hatred between different religious faiths has pushed all real problems of people aside. With political parties find the communal card to play an easy game to acquire their short-term goals, communal hatred has struck deep roots in our political culture.

As reports reach here, the recent communal holocaust in Gujarat started with a religious procession. It led to Hindu-Muslim confrontations in many cities of Gujarat. Business came to a stand still. In two days more than 60 lives were lost and property worth many crores destroyed.

Intolerance to others' views and faiths, or in that case to non-belief, is a major social illness. Religious processions, in most cases, are intolerant to other ways of thinking and the processionists always want to impose their religious presence on people of other faiths. The religious leaders who try to exhort their followers to proclaim their faith by taking out processions with communal nature are certainly disrupting civic life and annoy people who belong to other religions who also could be used by their religious leaders to show their muscles, which will eventually, lead to a communal clash.

The political parties that enter into conspiracies to divide people on communal lines have to be exposed. The secular democratic and socially conscious forces must come out hand in hand to check the challenge raised by communal forces against the very integrity of the nation. It is high time to fight communalism with vigor and determination. Sustained campaign for the separation of religion with political and social life of people has to be taken up seriously. Central and state governments have to be pressurized to spare no efforts to secure safety and security of people's life and property. We have to inform the people and make them conscious of their real problems, and for that the communalist hold has to be weakened. Preaching the superficial slogan of "communal harmony" is no answer. The people are to be re-educated with the basic tenets of genuine secularism. And that remains the only way out from the communal danger that threatens the normal life in cities and villages.

Punjab Killings and Delhi Communal riots

With the Akali party government of Punjab dilly-dallying between communalism and fundamentalism, and undoubtedly fail to put a stop to the communal killings in the state, riots are spreading to the nearby state Haryana and capital city Delhi. Almost everyday there is atleast one killing in Punjab—Sikh theocratic terrorists identifying non-sikhs and shooting them down, brutally. The Sikh terrorists aim building up fear in Hindu minds who live in Punjab, and thereby to leave the state and flee to nearby ones. And there are thousands of Hindu families who run for their life from Punjab, while Sikhs regularly migrate back to Punjab from other parts of the country. A dangerous and ugly communal division is in the making.

To accelerate this communal division, Hindu communal and fundamentalist forces are working overtime. The Hindu Siva Sena of Delhi has taken the lead to respond to the killings in

Punjab, outside Punjab. While strongly condemning the mood and trend of activities of the Hindu Siva Sena, we reiterate that the Sikh terrorism in Punjab has to be suppressed primarily by the state government. Peace-loving people who happened to born in both these religions will wholeheartedly support any such strong measure, undoubtedly.

The Muktsar killings of July 25th have been the latest in the series. Four Sikh terrorists who were travelling in a bus that had left Muktsar in Faridkot District to Chandigarh, forced the driver to stop it. They carefully separated Hindu men from the other passengers and killed them one by one. Fifteen were killed on the spot. Seven lie critically injured. In response to it, next day Hindu Siva Sena activists of Delhi started the communal riots. Not less than ten army companies had to enter Delhi streets to suppress the communal riots. Six persons were killed & 45 persons were injured in the Delhi riots.

These killings and brutality in the name of religion are an unspeakable tragedy, not only for the victims and their relatives, but for the whole country.

I strongly feel that the Barnala Government of Punjab cannot tackle the present situation in Punjab, as the Chief Minister does not have the guts to do it. And just as the drive against the terrorists has begun to be pressed, ministers in Barnala's cabinet have begun to denounce it. The Punjab communal situation can be faced courageously by a multi-party government—with parties with an avowed stand in favour of secularism and against communalism. Communalism is one of the major problems that faces India now. Unless and until religion is sidelined as individual's private affair and not social or political one, the growing menace of communalism cannot be curbed. But how long will we take to realise this fact?

Kerala's New Party

The formation of a new political party in Kerala, the Marxist Communist Party (MCP) which carries a big chunk of

the former ruling party of the state, Communist Party of India (Marxist) the approach towards religious communalism and sectarianism once again became the major point of controversy in the state politics. Political alliance with all the forces who oppose the Indian National Congress has been the central theme of the CPI (M) policy in the state since 1964. For the first time in the history of the state, the CPI (M) formed a government with the communal party, Muslim League an integral part of it, in 1967. This forced the Congress party to use the same strategy to pull down the CPI(M) government and establish their one, with Muslim League and Kerala Congress in it. Governments changed many times. Muslim League and Kerala Congress remained in all of them. They were neither anti-Congress nor anti-marxists, but just wanted to spread their communal base.

The rationalists have been strongly criticising the role of communal political parties in the state and the younger generation in all parties have certainly been influenced by the rationalist slogan. In tune with the trend of younger generation, the ageing leader of the CPI(M), Mr. E.M.S. Namboothirippad had to finally change his stand. He declared that there shall not be any more communal linkings in the state. But the second generation leadership and cadre, who had been repeatedly told that the earlier line of communal relationship was right, could not easily digest the change of strategy and hence the split in the CPI (M) into two equally strong groups. The new party (MCP) if succeeds in stabilizing itself, may further weaken the influence of CPI (M), but it will also stimulate the further communalization and fragmentation of Kerala politics. This can only be disturbing and unwelcome.

Meanwhile, the younger generation in CPI (M) further questions the sincerity of the party chief when he strongly defended the CPI (M) alliance with Muslim League in Tamil Nadu, the nearby state, and with BJP the Hindu communal party, in the northern states. The future of CPI(M) lies in the decision that Mr. Namboothirippad may take on this serious policy matter.

—Sanal

What is Rationalism?

—Joseph Edamaruku

A new-born child is devoid of any knowledge; it has only certain inborn instincts. As it sucks the mother's breast, nestling up to the warmth of her body, the child starts to get more and more knowledge about the surroundings. The light, the sound and the bed on which it lies gradually enter into the child's world. As its eyes grow clear and keener, it distinguishes people and objects. It sees the furniture, the toys, other members of the family. And as days pass, the child's world broadens. Hearing others talk, the child gets familiar with language. As it slowly learns to stand and walk, its boundaries of knowledge extends. This gives the child new ideas and perceptions though they may be vague then. When the child is taken to school, a new sphere of knowledge is open to him. By seeing, hearing and reading, he acquires more knowledge. He comes into contact with other children. Friendships are formed and the friends start exchanging and comparing their knowledge. Thus starts an endless process through which man grows.

Animals and birds need not have to grow through this process. They live only according to their natural instincts. The duckling that comes out of the egg almost immediately starts eating insects and grass. The new-born lamb begins prolicking and sucking its mother's nipple as soon as it comes out from the womb. Animals and birds do not need any training or practice to live on. They have only scant knowledge of their surroundings. Not so with us the humans. We know much about the world, the universe. It is possible for us to know much more and to make life more joyful and worthy to live. If a wild animal falls ill, it is sure to die. But humans get cured by treatment. Animals do not prepare food, nor do they know how to. They simply go in search of food, and if they fail in the search, end

Modern Freethinker

up in starvation and death. Humans cultivate land and grow food, domestic animals and birds, reproduce food and can eat all that they produce. Animals and birds submit themselves to their surroundings to live. But humans control and change their surroundings and nature, to go on living. And for this, knowledge is essential.

Animals and birds hardly learn from their forbeaters. Unlike them humans learn from their parents, teachers, friends, surroundings, books, cinema and television. We cannot live by inherent instincts alone. With the help of science and technology we make life more pleasant and comfortable. Hence the necessity for knowledge.

There are many ways of acquiring knowledge and storing it. Books, pictures and records are a few of them. Generations preserved and recorded their studies and enquiries for the benefits of forthcoming generations. We repeated this process for centuries, pushing away the boundaries of ignorance farther and farther.

While gaining knowledge and transmitting it to generations, errors and factual mistakes are likely to occur.

For example, the primitive man who lived in the forests by hunting was likely to have seen animals giving birth to their young. Women bear and give birth to the babies. Thus the elementary notion would be that the children come into the world by delivery. If one lived in a place where there were no birds, he would not know anything about hatching of eggs. He would insist on believing and saying that delivery is the sole means for multiplication of species.

This knowledge is incomplete, incorrect. But if a man who has seen hatching of birds, speaks about it at a place where there are no birds, people will naturally refuse to believe it. When some others also repeat it, a few may give credence to the story. When people come to understand more about birds, these two methods of multiplication of species become clear to them. But still, a single species multiplying by cutting itself into two, like the amo-

September 1986

extra will be unknown and unimaginable to them. If any part of the body of certain creatures get severed, that part grows into another one. In some other beings the buds or protrusions in the parents' body sever and grow up into new. The primitive men did not know anything about these things. It took a long time for humans to understand all these. The notions previously prevailing about multiplication of species were quite absurd.

As we go on learning more and more about nature, some errors are apt to creep in and they are later corrected. Animals drink water by going to the place where it is available. In old days humans also did similarly. But when our ancestors saw water lying still on leaves and husks of fruits, they studied to preserve and carry water to their abodes. Later they furrowed small channels that would carry water to the mouth of their caves. These channels were the precursors of the present irrigation and water management systems. The fire seen first in the forest was a wonderful phenomenon. It was a great moment for humans when they found that a dry thing could carry fire from place to place, and transfer it to another thing. Later by rubbing stones or pieces of wood, they learned to make fire. Fire helped them to drive away darkness from the caves, to save him from cold and to cook food. Nevertheless he did not know what fire was nor how it came into being. But from experiences they made certain inferences. They imagined that it was a great force that rule nature. Various fancies and phantasies were added to that primitive notion. And so our ancestors' imagination gave birth to the god of fire. They thought that the fire god would need the requests of humans and that he would oblige them. Now we know that such notions are absurd and fire is only a natural phenomenon. Even a child knows that fire is not a living organism and it cannot have thought or emotion like man or other beings. But the primitive human range of knowledge did not include this simple fact. It is the knowledge about ourselves and our surroundings that make life enjoyable. Knowledge is the one thing that leads us to progress. It is knowledge that led the

savage cave men to the age of modern civilization. The babe that knows nothing grows up and become an intellectual giant by acquiring knowledge. Learned men are respected by all. But how knowledge is acquired?

We have seen that the path to progress is knowledge. How do we gain it? All beings including humans have five means to acquire knowledge from the surroundings, nature.

They are called the five senses. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin. These are the five senses or sensory organs.

Those who can see understand many things with the eyes. We understand different shapes of different objects and different colours by seeing them with our eyes. Eyes are essential to read also. But one cannot insist that one shall accept as true only the things one sees. Hearing is as important as seeing. We understand sounds by hearing them. Language was only spoken sounds before the written form was bestowed to it. Even now ear is the important medium in the spreading of ideas. We understand most things by seeing and hearing.

There are many things that cannot be seen or heard. Smell is one of them. We can distinguish between the fragrance of flowers and the stink of decay. It is the power of the nose. Those who are endowed with a keen sense of smell can catch the different smells of different human bodies.

Dogs and some other beings have really amazing sense of smell. Dogs of certain particular breeds have keener olfactory sense than dogs of other breeds. Such dogs are trained for detection of crimes. Another sensory organ is the tongue, and that enables us to talk and taste. Tongue has a significant role in the exchange of ideas. We know the different tastes with the tongue. What we come to know by tongue cannot be known by seeing, hearing or smelling. Skin is the fifth sensory organ. Cold, heat, smoothness, roughness etc. are comprehended by

touch. These five organs transmit their sensations to the brain where they are instantly analysed and acted upon.

Man's brain is a great receptacle which is capable of storing and utilizing all the knowledge gained through the sensations of the five organs, as and when necessary. The brain of no other being is as developed as that of humans. Hence they cannot collect knowledge and make progress as humans are able to. Brain analyses the knowledge gained through the sensations by the five organs, comes to appropriate conclusions, issues necessary commands and also performs many other kinds of functions. We call these performances and such other functions of the brain by the term mind.

The Storehouses of Knowledge

Though animals have only a less developed brain, they too keep a limited quantum of knowledge in the brain. They do not use weapons or other tools. Elephant is stronger than humans. But it can pull weight with its trunk only. Instead we use cranes. Humans cannot dig holes in the earth with his load hands as the ants and rats do. But he can construct big tunnels by using machines. Humans cannot climb the tree like a squirrel. But one can climb any tree with the aid of a ladder. Once, our ancestors stood gaping at the birds that soared higher and higher in the sky. Today we have transcended all the birds in that respect. Dogs, deer, horses etc. were swifter runners. But they cannot dream catching up with our automobiles. How did human excel all the other beings in strength and speed and building skill? Other beings can work only with the organs of their body. But unlike them, humans learned to work with tools. This is the point of departure between beast and man. Learning to use stone and sticks was a leap in the long process of evolution of man. That it is easier to dig up and move earth with a stick than to move it with bare hands was an important discovery. Another great piece of knowledge was that beasts could be killed with sharp stones. They tried to pass on this newly gained knowledge

to others. And this passing of ideas was attempted and practised with very crude sounds. Over a long period, these crude sounds metamorphosed into spoken language. The evolution of language worked wonders in the exchange and dissemination of knowledge.

This exchange of knowledge immensely facilitated the progress of man. Every one tried to pass on the knowledge and experiences one gained to everyone else and to later generations. Although it was a great achievement, there was a danger also lurking in it. One gained knowledge from one's experience. But some times one might understand an experience in a wrong way. For instance, a hunter of those days might have appeared to see a big bird with round red eyes, unseen hitherto in the dimlight of shadows in the forest. When it flew away flapping its wings, he might have mistaken the bird to a flying man, and would tell the others accordingly. The others could do nothing to verify it. They too might repeat the same story to some others. This absurd notion would lead them to an absurd belief. When language was only the spoken word, wrong notions together with the right ones found their way into our ancestors' minds. These confusions increased when people were put to the necessity of receiving knowledge from others. Because beasts do not receive knowledge from other beasts, they are free of superstitions. Humans having become accustomed to use weapons and tools began to depict their experiences of hunting and the sights that struck them as remarkable on the walls of caves. Thus began painting. This made a revolution of the alphabets. This made a revolution in the preserving of knowledge. Until then knowledge was kept in memory only. Now it became possible to gather and keep knowledge outside the precincts of brain and use it as and when the need arose. This enabled the later generations to draw upon the vast and varied knowledge of the prior generations, obviating the necessity for going over the same experiment repeatedly. Although this reduced the functioning of the brain and the labour of man

This fact was quite clear to the ancient philosophers themselves. So they divided knowledge into reality and illusion. Reality (real knowledge) and illusion (unreal knowledge) exist together. A single human himself may say right and wrong things. There may be both right and wrong things in the same book. It is necessary for one to sort out the right from the wrong, for going forward. How to do it? What is the way? The only way is to weigh evidence in an unbiased manner without any pre-conceived notions, and to ascertain facts from the unreal imaginary things. This is what the intelligent men do and ought to do. This process of thinking is called rationalism.

The Scientific Way

People were accustomed to examine and revise the various items of knowledge and to accept and practise the right ones from the very ancient times. But it seems that a large section of people have given up the pattern of thinking.

The primitive people who roamed the forests formed small tribes and began to work according to the dictates of the patriarch. Some became the rulers and others the ruled. The ruled had to absolutely obey the rulers without any questioning. Either the rulers or some wisemen think, and others accept it without questioning. This is what we see today. Many who think that certain ideas are their own do not know that those ideas have been blindly taken from others. Those had been living in abject submission to nature gradually began to conquer the forces of nature. Simultaneously some people began to subordinate and subject some others to their well being and to exploit them. This gave rise to rulers and priests; a horde of exploiters. They misled and threatened the majority of the people in various ways. They said that it was god who gave power to the kings, so obey the kings unquestioningly. The priests said that the brahmins were born from the face of

creator, so worship the brahmins. They said that fear of god is the beginning of knowledge.

To doubt, to question, to search—all these were condemned. Belief in supernatural forces became universal. As a result, superstitions and exploitation also became universal and it hampered the progress of man for a long time.

Make new discoveries by observations and experiments. Revise old notions and beliefs and distinguish the right and the wrong in them on the basis of rationalism. Go forward in that right direction. It is the scientific way to progress.

(Contd. next issue)

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10 COMMANDMENTS

Bertrand Russell

- ☐ Do not feel absolutely certain of anything.
- ☐ Do not think it worthwhile to produce belief by concealing evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.
- ☐ Never try to discourage thinking, for you are sure to succeed.
- ☐ When you meet with opposition, even if it should be from your children, endeavour to overcome it by argument, and by not authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illuayry.
- ☐ Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.
- ☐ Do not use power to suppress opinions you think pernicious, for, if you do the opinions will suppraas you.
- ☐ Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.
- ☐ Find more pleasure in intelligent dissent than in passive agreement, for, if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than the latter.
- ☐ Be scrupulously truthful, even when truth is inconvenient, for, it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.
- ☐ Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fool's paradise, for, only a fool will think that is happiness.

STAND YE TOGETHER

A man who stands alone, having decided to obey the truth, may be weak and slip back into his old ways. Therefore stand ye together, assist one another, and, strengthen one another's efforts.

—Gautama Buddha